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ABSTRACT

This study examined the perceptions of alienation among special and general education teachers and measured the level of alienation between special education teachers assigned to inclusion vs. self-contained/resource classrooms. Teachers (N=575, 395 general education teachers, 180 special education teachers) in grades K-12 from a metropolitan school district in South Central Texas were assessed with the Dean Alienation Scale to determine their perceptions of isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness within their school environment. Results indicated that special education teachers had significantly higher levels of alienation than general education teachers. In addition, there were no significant differences in alienation found between special education teachers assigned to inclusion classrooms and special education teachers assigned to resource or self-contained classrooms. Results suggest that the psycho-social benefits associated with inclusion of students with learning disabilities found in previous studies did not transfer to special education teachers. Findings are discussed in terms of a macrostructural framework to reduce the perceptions of alienation among special education teachers. (Contains 39 references.) (Author/DB)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to: (a) investigate the perceptions of alienation among special and general education teachers, and (b) to measure the level of alienation between special education teachers assigned to inclusion vs. self-contained/resource classrooms. Five hundred and seventy-five teachers (grades K-12) from a metropolitan school district in South Central Texas were assessed with the Dean Alienation Scale to determine their perceptions of isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness within their school environment. Results indicated that special education teachers had significantly higher levels of alienation than general education teachers. In addition, there were no significant differences in alienation found between special education teachers assigned to inclusion classrooms and special education teachers assigned to resource or self-contained classrooms. This suggests the psycho-social benefits associated with inclusion of students with learning disabilities found in previous studies did not transfer to special education teachers. These findings are discussed within the context of a macrostructural framework to reduce the perceptions of alienation among special education teachers.

Perceptions of Alienation Among Special and General Education Teachers

Over the last two decades researchers have documented the relatively high rate of attrition, or movement out of the field among special education teachers across the United States (Billingsley, 1993; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Brownell, Smith,& Miller, 1995). Although the annual rate of non-returning special education teachers is high, within individual states the percentage has reached critical levels. For example, attrition of special educators has been reported to be as high as 13% in North Carolina and 14% in Wisconsin (Bogenschild, Lauritzen, & Metzke, 1988; Singer, 1993). Most investigations have found that special education teachers who leave the field are dissatisfied and decide not to return to the classroom based upon a number of factors (Billingsley, 1993; Westling & Whitten, 1996). Three factors cited by special education teachers as reasons for leaving the profession are: (a) lack of administrative support (from principals and supervisors at the school and central office); (b) insufficient involvement in decision making within the school (their needs and desires as professionals are not considered in the overall mission of the school), and (c) lack of collegial support (from general educators). This lack of recognition, understanding, acceptance, and peer support from general educators has been found to be a decisive issue for many special education teachers who do not return to teaching (Westling & Whitten, 1996).

Historically special educators have fared poorly in American public schools in terms of resources and professional status as compared to their general education peers (Meredith & Underwood, 1995). Disharmony between general and special educators has been exacerbated in recent years over the issue of inclusion, or placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Many special educators believe that general education teachers do not want students with disabilities in their classrooms and are unwilling to do the extra work necessary to achieve success with these students (Gersten, Gillman, Morvant, & Billingsley, 1995). Criswell, Anderson, Slate, and Jones (1993) found that general education classroom teachers expressed overall negative attitudes toward special educators and the students they serve. The authors suggest

that general educators hold disapproving perceptions toward special educators due to a number of reasons, but specifically: (1) general educators generally have large classes which make individualization and modifications for students with disabilities difficult, and (2) general educators may be overwhelmed with the demands placed upon them by more and more students with diverse learning needs placed in their classes because of the national movement toward inclusive education.

Interestingly enough, however, the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms has apparently helped special educators gain some respect from general educators, who now acknowledge the challenges of working with students with disabilities. By working with special education teachers, general educators have learned about special education skills such as assessing learning styles and abilities, modifying curriculum, using various teaching strategies to meet student needs, and providing emotional support for students (Hanson, 1996). However, according to Hanson (1996), while inclusive practices have brought increased understanding, it has also brought about its own set of problems.

In some inclusive classes, the collaborative, co-teaching relationship has actually lowered the special educator's status. Rather than the general and special education teacher working as equals, the special education teachers is treated as an aide, a paraprofessional. General educators have expressed concern about the effectiveness of team teaching with special educators (Siegel, 1992). Issues such as differences in instructional content and style, instructional focus and orientation, and personality issues were of greatest concern to general educators.

Hanson (1996) expressed concern that special educators might not be included in the planning process and may have little input as to how information should be presented or modified. Or, that special educators would be allowed to present only the "less complicated" material to the class, while the general educators would serve as the primary teacher in the classroom. In the worst situations, Hanson (1996) reported stories of special education teachers being directed to perform menial tasks such as passing out papers or erasing the chalkboard. Thus, the special education teacher might now be denigrated in the eyes of the general educators, the administration,

and the students.

Of course successful stories abound in the literature pertaining to models of inclusion and collaboration between general and special educators (Giangreco, Baumgart, & Doyle, 1995; Baines, Baines, & Masterson, 1994; Stainback, Stainback, & Jackson, 1992). For example, Philips, Sapona and Lubic (1995) reported that with good quality in-service training and administrative support, positive relationships were forged between general and special educators working as a team to benefit all students in an inclusive classroom. In classroom situations where general and special educators work collaboratively together in order to successfully include students with disabilities in the regular classroom, the benefits to students with disabilities become apparent in the areas of academic growth (Fuchs, 1995), psycho-social skills (Snow, 1991), and acceptance by non-disabled peers (Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994; Staub & Peck, 1995).

Shoho, Katims, and Wilks (1997) found that high school students with learning disabilities who received pull-out academic support services reported significantly higher perceptions of alienation than similar students who were included all day in general education classes with the presence of a supportive special education teacher in the classroom. The authors reasoned there was a combination of explanations as to why these student felt more alienation, including the particular Ericksonian stage of development of the students, attitudes and expectations of non-special education adults and peers, and the lack of personal involvement in IEP team decision making process. This and other research (Banerji & Dailey, 1995; Giangraco, Baumgart, & Doyle, 1995; Madden & Slavin, 1983; Philips, Sapona, & Lubic, 1995) seem to support the fact that there appears to be some psycho-social psychological benefits for students with disabilities placed in inclusive environments (i.e., not feeling ostracized, promoting individualization, interdependence, equity, access, diversity, self-esteem, positive attitudes, and a sense of community among students with disabilities). Questions remain as to whether the psycho-social benefits achieved by students with disabilities included in general education are also experienced by special education teachers.

Alienation of Teachers

Teacher alienation is not a newly developed or studied concept. A number of studies have examined specific variables related to teacher and administrator alienation. Alienation studies involving perceptions of teachers, administrators, and learning disabled students have focused on school organizational power structures (Strauss, 1974); on at-risk youth in high school (Firestone, 1989; Newman, 1981); gender (Calabrese & Anderson, 1986); structure and organizational of schools and its effect on teachers (Tye, 1987); teachers' years of experience (Calabrese & Fisher, 1988); secondary school administrators (Calabrese & Ellsworth, 1989); teacher burnout (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991); and the effects of inclusion on learning disabled students (Shoho, Katims, & Wilks, 1997).

For the purpose of the present study, alienation was defined using Dean's (1961) multidimensional definition consisting of three separate constructs: isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness. The multidimensionality of alienation has been shown to be operationally valid within a school context (Mau, 1992). Seeman (1959) originally defined alienation as an affective construct consisting of five variables: isolation, normlessness, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. Dean (1961) collapsed Seeman's five variables of alienation into three.

Isolation defines a feeling of being alone. Teachers who feel isolated tend to be separated from mainstream groups. Isolated teachers feel a lack of connection to others in their environment. The lack of personal interaction outside a specific domain is visible.

Normlessness is associated with a person who does not feel apart of the norm within a given context. Normless teachers perceive themselves, and believe others perceive them as being different in a negative way. Normlessness is associated with a person whose value system is inconsistent with school norms (i.e., working abnormal students, and as a result being labeled in a similar negative notion as their students).

Powerlessness represents an inability to influence one's choices in a given environment. Teachers who feel powerless believe they can not affect the decisions of others. Powerless teachers

often give up at the first sign of resistance or failure. Instead of trying harder on a given task, powerless teachers tend to rationalize any effort to achieve a certain goal as a waste of time.

In addition to its operational and constitutive definitions, alienation has been viewed as a situational construct describing the independent relationship between an individual and their environment (Dean, 1961). Situational factors provide an explanation for why someone may be alienated in one context but not in another (Avi-Itzhak, 1987; Calabrese & Seldin, 1986). Another way to conceptualize alienation is to view it from a personal and institutional perspective. On a personal level, the relationship involving alienation and the individual can be characterized bilaterally. Depending on the context, an individual can be the initiator or recipient of alienating circumstances. As a result, being alienated may not effect each individual adversely (e.g., some of the greatest human minds have chosen to alienate themselves from society or various subgroups).

On an organizational level, the relationship between the institution and the individual tends to be more unilateral with the individual being a recipient of alienating situations created by institutional factors. In other words, the institutional structure may affect individual behavior adversely (Senge, 1990). And while alienation is ultimately a personal phenomena, institutional factors can contribute to the adverse effects of alienation (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). When viewed in this manner, alienation provides one explanation for the disjuncture between one's expectations and their actual experiences (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

The purpose of this study was to: (1) measure the level of alienation among general and special education teachers, and (2) measure the level of alienation between special education teachers assigned to inclusive settings in which they worked full-time in general education classrooms, and special education teachers assigned to resources and self-contained classrooms. If special education teachers experience higher levels of alienation than general education teachers, the implications for current practices would be far-reaching and substantial in terms of overall school environment and administrative focus. Likewise if special education teachers experience similar or differential levels of alienation due to their working environment, this might indicate a transfer or

lack of psycho-social benefits from special education student to teacher.

Methods

Participants

Five hundred and seventy-five teachers participated in this study. Of the 575 participants, 395(69%) were general education teachers, while 180(31%) were special education teachers. The sample represented a large portion of the teaching force of a metropolitan school district located in a middle socioeconomic status community in South Central Texas. Table 1 shows demographical characteristics collected from participants.

Instrument

The Dean Alienation Scale is a 24-item five point Likert scale which has been widely used to assess levels of alienation with a variety of school populations ranging from adolescent students to teachers and administrators. The instrument is divided into three subscales: isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness. The cumulative score of the three subscales comprise the total alienation score. The possible range of scores for the instrument are as follows: total alienation, 0 - 120; powerlessness, 0 - 45; normlessness, 0 - 30; and isolation, 0 - 45. Higher scores on the Dean Alienation Scale represent higher levels of the construct being measured.

According to Dean (1961), the Dean Alienation Scale possesses the following split-half reliability coefficients: Total Alienation = .78; Isolation = .83; Normlessness = .73; and Powerlessness = .78. The instrument's construct validity has been field tested using a variety of groups.

Procedures

Each participant's level of alienation was measured using the Dean Alienation Scale (Dean, 1961). The instrument was administered to all special education participants at a school district wide in-service meeting for special educators. General educators were administered the instrument at individual school faculty meetings. In all cases, teachers responded to the instrument alone, without discussing the survey with any colleague.

Results

Alienation scores in this study were obtained using the Dean Alienation Scale. The dependent variables measured were isolation, normlessness, powerlessness, and a cumulative score indicating total alienation. The independent variables collected for both general and special educators were teacher classification (i.e., special versus general education), gender, ethnicity, age group, school level taught (i.e., elementary, middle, high), years of experience, and degree status. In addition, special education teachers were asked to identify whether they worked in an inclusion or a non-inclusion environment. Data analysis revealed the following major findings:

1. Special education teachers reported significantly higher levels of alienation than general education teachers. In particular, special education teachers reported significantly higher levels of isolation, normlessness and powerlessness than general education teachers.

2. There were no significant differences found in gender, ethnicity, age group, years of experience, and degree status between general and special educators.

3. There were no significant differences in alienation levels between special education teachers who worked in an inclusion setting versus special education teachers who worked in non-inclusion setting.

The alienation scores were analyzed using one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). The four dependent measures of alienation were examined in each of the analyses. The predetermined level of significance used for this study was $p \leq .05$.

All major findings were related to teacher classification (i.e., general versus special) and special education working environment (i.e., inclusion versus non-inclusion). The multivariate F ratio for determining alienation differences between special and general education participants was found to be statistically significant (Wilk's lambda = .750, F = 47.521, df = 4, 570, p = .0001). This result indicates that special education teachers reported higher levels of alienation than general education teachers. Table 2 illustrates the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables

for special and general education teachers. Subsequent analyses of the data using one factor analysis of variance (ANOVA) factorial techniques revealed that special education teachers reported significantly higher levels of isolation, normlessness and powerlessness than general education teachers.

The first one-way ANOVA addressed the isolation subscale. Based on the data, special education teachers ($F(1, 573) = 123.19$, $p = .0001$) reported significantly higher levels of isolation than regular education teachers. This result indicates the greater sense of isolation that special education teachers feel in contrast to their general education colleagues.

The second significant result illustrated that special education teachers reported significantly higher levels of normlessness than general education teachers, $F(1, 573) = 59.28$, $p = .0001$. This finding suggests that special education teachers feel more stigmatized and less connected to the school value structure than general education teachers.

The third significant finding illustrated that special education teachers felt more powerlessness than general education teachers, $F(1, 573) = 3.924$, $p = 0481$. This result demonstrates that special education teachers perceive less control over the school environment than general education teachers.

The last dependent measured addressed the total alienation score which represents the sum of the three subscales. Total alienation differentiation showed that special education teachers had significantly higher levels of alienation than general education teachers, $F(1, 573) = 71.736$, $p = .0001$.

In addition to addressing the difference in alienation levels between special and general education teachers, a second area addressed the special education sample only. Findings indicated that there were no significant differences between special education teachers who worked in an inclusion setting and those who worked in a non-inclusion setting, Wilk's lambda = .979, $F = .955$, $df = 4; 175$, $p = .4339$. Table 3 illustrates the means and standard deviations of the dependent variables for inclusion and non-inclusion based special education teachers.

Discussion

Based on the results, special education teachers reported significantly higher levels of alienation (i.e., isolated, normless, and powerless) than general education teachers. In addition, no significant differences were found in reported levels of alienation between special education teachers who spent all of their work day in the general education classroom working with students with disabilities and special education teachers in resource or self-contained settings. This finding appear to indicate that the psycho-social benefits associated with inclusion of students with disabilities found in previous studies (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994; Shoho, Katims, & Wilks, 1997; Snow, 1991; Staub & Peck, 1995) was not experienced similarly by special education teachers.

These findings seem to support the theoretical framework of an institutional structure (i.e., public schools) that fosters a sense of alienation among subgroups within its population. From a practical standpoint, this finding confirms empirically what special education teachers, regardless of where they may deliver services have sensed for years. Given this, what can educational leaders such as school principals do to minimize the alienation of special education teachers? Using a macrostructural perspective, several plausible explanations are explored to address the perception of alienation among special education teachers.

The first macrostructural explanation for the alienation of special education teachers is based on Senge's (1990) work on learning organizations. Unfortunately, most schools do not resemble learning organizations as defined by Senge. According to Senge, a learning organization involves five sequential building blocks: personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Analogous to Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, Senge's five building blocks form the basis for building an overall structure that supports a learning organization and minimizes institutional alienation. According to Senge (1990), unless each of the five building blocks are fulfilled, an organization is likely to revert back to its original form (i.e., an alienating structure).

For special education teachers and specifically, school administrators, the challenge is to create a shared vision that changes the way individuals view their personal and institutional roles. As Senge (1990) notes, "One of the deepest desires underlying shared vision is the desire to be connected to a larger purpose and to one another" (p. 230). Once a shared vision is achieved, educational leaders can create an environment where team learning and systems thinking can flourish (i.e., personal alienation can be reduced).

Another explanation for the perceptions of alienation among special education teachers may be the collective attitude and expectations of non-special education school personnel toward special education and its services. A less than positive attitude on the part of non-special education school personnel may play a strong role in influencing the perceptions of alienation among special education teachers. Feelings of normlessness and isolation may result when these attitudes are an integral part of the school climate. Special education teachers may have perceptions of alienation due to their association with learning disabled students (Cross & Billingsley, 1994), and their role ambiguity to the overall mission of the school (Westling & Whitten, 1996).

Perceptions by the general education teachers may be implicitly or explicitly communicated to their special education colleagues. To minimize the alienation of special education teachers, school principals should consider implementing macrostructures to enhance professional collegiality (Shono, Katims, & Wilks, 1997). Similar to their students, special education teachers who are disenfranchised from the decision-making and educational placement process may lack feelings of self-advocacy and hence, feel powerless against the school structure. If special educators become apart of the deep structure (Tye, 1987) within schools, their perceptions of alienation may be alleviated. This sense of alienation may be addressed in numerous ways inside and outside of the school structure.

An example of an outside macrostructural solution is provided by the Texas Legislature. In Texas, as of July 1, 1998, all Individual Education Planning (IEP) committee meetings must include (1) a representative of the local school district administration, or designee approved by the

superintendent; (2) two teachers, a special and general education teacher; (3) a parent, or the student if he or she is eighteen or older. By requiring a special and general education teacher to participate in IEP proceedings, role ambiguity is likely to be reduced and role appreciation for the special education teacher is likely to be enhanced.

As the results of this study indicate, the alienation of special education teachers is an issue which needs to be addressed. School principals who wish to achieve a working environment which maximizes the potential of all their employees should examine the issues discussed in this article and formulate customized responses to minimize the effects of alienation. There is "no one size fits all" panacea that will cure the alienating nature of certain school practices (Shoho, Katims, & Wilks, 1997). As stated earlier, while alienation is a personal phenomena, school leaders should take measures to minimize the potential adverse effects of institutional structures and policies. Otherwise, the marginalization and retention of quality special education teachers is likely to remain problematic.

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Table 1

Frequency and Percent of Selected Demographic Characteristics of General and Special Educators (N = 575)

Characteristics	General	Special
Gender		
Female	314(81%)	147(82%)
Male	72(19%)	33(18%)
Ethnicity		
African American	10(3%)	8(4%)
Anglo	318(83%)	147(82%)
Hispanic	45(11%)	19(11%)
Other	10(3%)	6(3%)
Age Group		
20-29	70(19%)	34(19%)
30-39	92(24%)	36(20%)
40-49	146(39%)	79(44%)
50 and over	67(18%)	31(17%)
Years of Experience		
One to Five	99(25%)	87(48%)
Six to Ten	90(22%)	45(25%)
Eleven and over	205(52%)	48(27%)

(table continues)

Table 1

Frequency and Percent of Selected Demographic Characteristics of General and Special Educators (N = 575)

Characteristics	General	Special
Grade Level		
Elementary	167(42%)	65(36%)
Middle	138(35%)	75(42%)
High	90(23%)	40(22%)
Degree		
Bachelor	234(59%)	102(57%)
Master	155(39%)	78(43%)
Other	6(2%)	0(0%)

Note: Nine participants did not identify their gender.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Special versus General Education Teachers

	Total Alienation**		Isolation**		Normlessness**		Powerlessness*	
Group	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Special	61.93	9.97	26.44	4.57	13.74	2.98	21.69	5.18
General	53.60	11.35	21.58	5.01	11.45	3.44	20.76	5.31

Note. The number of special and general education teachers was 180 and 395, respectively.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Special Education Teachers who work in Inclusion versus Non-Inclusion Settings

	Total Alienation		Isolation		Normlessness		Powerlessness	
Group	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Non-Inclusion	62.50	10.19	26.78	4.72	13.73	3.06	21.91	5.21
Inclusion	60.02	9.05	25.32	3.87	13.76	2.71	20.95	5.02

Note. The number of participants from non-inclusion and inclusion based arrangements were 139 and 41, respectively.